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# **GETHSEMANE, GABBATHA, GOLGOTHA: THE ARREST, TRIALS AND EXECUTION OF JESUS OF NAZARETH.\***

*In Memoriam: Burton B. Thurston (1920-1990)*

A review article based on Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave (A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels)*. Two volumes. 1,608 pp. The Anchor Bible Reference Library, Doubleday, New York, 1994. ISBN 0-385-19396-3 (vol.1); 0-385-19397-1 (vol.2). \$U.S. 75.00

*Henry Innes MacAdam*

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## **Introduction**

Raymond Brown's achievements in the field of biblical study and commentary are well-documented over the past thirty years. The *Death of the Messiah* has been in preparation for more than a decade, and appears almost simultaneously with a revised edition of its widely-acclaimed predecessor, *The Birth of the Messiah*. Readers should be aware of the monumental task Brown set himself when he tackled the subjects of the birth and the death of Jesus. The contrast in sources could not be more striking. The Matthean and Lukan accounts of the nativity contain some of the least historical material in the entire New Testament canon. By sharp contrast the Gospel accounts of the passion bring us probably as close to the historical Jesus as we can come without new textual and/or archaeological discoveries.

From the beginning Brown is very conscious of the *dramatic* aspect of the Passion Narratives, or, as he abbreviates them, the

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“PNs.” His commentary is therefore presented in four “Acts”. Acts I, II and IV are broken into two “Scenes” each, but Act III is treated as a unit. Volume 1 (877 pp.) comprises the first three Acts: Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane, his interrogation by the Jewish Sanhedrin, his “trial” by the Roman governor. More than half of Volume 2 (731 pp.) is devoted to the fourth and final “Act”, Jesus’ crucifixion and burial, to which are attached some 300 pages of appendices and indices. At the very end of his “Preface and Acknowledgements” Brown admits to being asked if he plans a concluding work, *The Resurrection of the Messiah*, of what would be a trilogy. With characteristic good humor he notes that he would rather investigate that topic “face to face” (xii).

The two volumes are paginated consecutively. A general bibliography in Vol. 1 (94-106) is supplemented throughout both volumes by “sectional” bibliographies inaugurating each “Scene”. Each “Act” opens with an introductory essay, but for the events of Gethsemane and Golgotha there are “transitional episodes”. For the former this links the Last Supper in Jerusalem and subsequent arrest at the Mount of Olives; for the latter it is the events along the *Via Dolorosa* between Pilate’s *praetorium* and Calvary. Most “Scenes” conclude with a comprehensive “Analysis” of their individual components. Subsections of each scene are preceded by Brown’s translation of the passage(s) examined. Following two comprehensive and detailed Indices in Vol. 2 (“Bibliographical Index of Authors” and “Index of Subjects”) is Brown’s translation of the PN’s grouped (by evangelist) as continuous texts. Vols. 1 and 2 include “illustrative tables” relating to textual analysis.

The text of Vol. 2 concludes with nine appendices treating topics too complex to tackle in the main study: *The Gospel of Peter*, the date of the crucifixion, passages very difficult to translate, Judas Iscariot, Jewish groups, a comparison of Isaac’s sacrifice and Jesus’ death, the OT influence in the PN’s, Jesus’ predictions of his own death, and whether there was an earlier source for the Markan PN. The last is a contribution by Brown’s friend and colleague, Marion Soards. Below I examine what I hope is a representative selection of topics from *The Death of the Messiah* to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of Brown’s research.



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These are issues of particular interest to me, and therefore choosing them has been a subjective process. Nevertheless I feel they address the aim, scope and method of Brown's scholarship and do justice to the thoroughness and erudition so evident in these two very important volumes. Beyond the introductory remarks this article is arranged in three sections, each corresponding to an Aramaic toponym. Each designates a place associated with an event central to the last day in the life of Jesus: *Gethsemane* where he was arrested, *Gabbatha* where he was judged by Pilate, and *Golgotha* where he was executed. Each word begins with *gimel*, the third letter of all Semitic alphabets, and given the numeric value of three. Thus this "triad" of names suggested itself as headings for the three subdivisions I use. Unless otherwise indicated, numbers in parentheses with no accompanying designation refer to pages in *The Death of the Messiah*. All dates are A.D. unless otherwise specified. A list of abbreviations follows the Postscript.

## Historicity in the Passion Narratives:

Because of their blend of history, theology, tradition, bias, piety and fiction, the Gospels (1) demand a clear indication of what they are in the context of related ancient literature, biblical or other and (2) the PNs in particular demand a careful assessment of their "historicity". Brown nowhere addresses the first issue in even a cursory fashion. It will not be out of place to mention here G.W. Bowersock's *Fiction as History* (1994), a recent examination of Graeco-Roman literature in which historical material is imbedded within fanciful narratives. Bowersock offers special insights to understanding the Gospels in a broader context in two chapters: "The Wounded Savior" and "Polytheism and Scripture". The latter is particularly useful for assessments of "eucharistic motifs" in the non-biblical literary tradition. Readers who are interested in the related topic of persecution within the early Christian community may consult with profit Bowersock's *Martyrdom and Rome* (1995). Also worthy of careful reading is F.F. Bruce, "The New Testament and Classical Studies", *NTS* 22 (1975/6) 229-242.

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The second topic, historicity, is by contrast given full and fair treatment by Brown as the subject of an introductory essay ("The Role of History", pp. 13-24). In it we are offered what I might term an "irreducible minimum": basic assumptions with which no historian or biblical scholar might take issue: "In application to the passion one can characterize as bedrock history that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified at Jerusalem at the end of the first third of the 1st cent. A.D. when Pontius Pilate was governor [i.e. of Judaea]" (p. 13). Nearly 1,500 pages later we read: "Historicity should be determined not by what we think possible or likely, but by the antiquity and reliability of the evidence ..." (p. 1468).

The two statements do not fit together well precisely because establishing "bedrock history" entails adjudging the evidence on a sliding scale ranging from "certain" to "not impossible" (p. 22). The *antiquity* of such evidence is not always a guarantee of its reliability. Brown not only fails to make a good case for his understanding of what is "historical" evidence, he fails to fully address an important issue: how modern Roman historians view the passion narratives. The four Gospel accounts (and associated NT literature) testify that the actions of an individual Palestinian Jew and the imperial authority of his day intersected, briefly and very violently. But extant non-Christian sources, admittedly few and comparatively sketchy, also plot that intersection. The Gospels and related early Church literature can and should be examined by scholars who have no more nor less expertise in Christian theology than they do in Egyptian, Persian or Graeco-Roman theology. I have argued elsewhere (*Topoi* 2 [1992] 251) that NT research should not be monopolized by biblical scholars.

Once reminded of the limitations of the sources we may begin to outline just how Brown approaches the various traditions regarding the death of Jesus. Thus: "The canonical PNs are the product of a development that has involved considerable dramatization, so that exact history is not a category applicable to them" (p. 1346) and "... early preGospel tradition is not necessarily history" (p. 17 note 21). Mindful that such statements from the pen of a Roman Catholic scholar will seem extraordinary, Brown adds in a footnote: "May I point out that this [i.e. the statement on p. 1346]



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is not necessarily a liberal view, e.g., it was espoused in reference to the Gospel accounts of Jesus' whole ministry both by the Roman Pontifical Biblical Commission and by the Second Vatican Council ...” (p. 1346 note 59).

Brown makes several statements on the historical value of the PNs which I think are fair to collect here, since all point in the same direction: what can we know for certain about the arrest, trials and execution of Jesus of Nazareth? Brown reviews (pp. 17-19) the general criteria central to NT scholarship. Some reference there to C.A. Evans, “Authenticity Criteria in Life of Jesus Research”, *CSR* 19 (1989) 6-31 would have been appropriate. For his purposes Brown selects four as of paramount importance: “multiple attestation”, “coherence”, “embarrassment” and “discontinuity or dissimilarity” in the sources. In each case he offers cogent reasons for caution and even scepticism. Therefore it is worth singling out, as they occur later in the volumes, Brown's more provocative thoughts on some characteristic components of sources which may or may not satisfy the requirements of historicity:

(a) **Plausibility**: “In a writing that involves a historical setting, whether that writing is 90% fact or 90% fiction, one expects at least minimum plausibility about circumstances with which everyone would be familiar” (p. 1341).

(b) **Descriptive Narrative**: “The survival of the story [i.e. Peter's denials of Jesus] without a basis in fact seems incredible; yet the Gospel narratives reflect strongly an imaginative storytelling style. Basic fact and imaginative description, however, are not an impossible combination” (p. 621).

(c) **Narrative Antiquity**: “... traceable antiquity in narration should not be confused with historicity” (p. 1029 note 107).

(d) **Verisimilitude**: “Verisimilitude ... can be the product of imagination as well as of history” (p. 622 note 64) and therefore “... it is not the same as historical likelihood” (p. 18 note 24).

(e) **Dramatic Narrative**: “Truth conveyed by drama can at times be more effectively impressed on people's minds than truth conveyed by history” (p. 1312).



(f) **Negativity:** "Absolute negative statements (e.g. the account has no historical basis) must often go beyond the kind of evidence available to biblical scholars" (p. 1312).

## **Chronology: The Last Supper and the Date of the Crucifixion**

### ***The Last Supper:***

After reviewing the many arguments for and against this meal being the Passover Seder, Brown concludes that it was not. He might have added that the Pauline (I Cor. 11:23-25) recounting of the tradition about that meal is significantly silent on this very issue. That the Last Supper had neither paschal *nor sacramental* significance to the author of the *Gospel of John* also elicits little comment. Thus for Brown the twenty-four hours from Thursday sunset until Friday sunset is the 14th of Nisan and (as John clearly insists) the Preparation Day for Passover. The death of Jesus therefore occurred a few hours before the onset of Passover, the 15th of Nisan (p. 1373). Brown is therefore justified (pp. 122-3) in rejecting any suggestion that the "hymn" sung at the close of the Last Supper was the Hallel or closing psalm of a Passover meal. Though he refers (p. 123 note 12) to Pauline examples of hymn-singing among the early Christian communities, nothing is said of Pliny the Younger's account c.115 of this tradition in his famous letter (*Epis.* 10.96) to the Emperor Trajan regarding the Christian community of Bithynia.

### ***The Date of the Crucifixion:***

Aligning the beginning of Passover with sundown on a Friday does not solve the riddle of which day of which month of which year (of our "common era") the crucifixion occurred, but in Brown's reasoning only the familiar dates of 7 April 30 and 3 April 33 satisfy the calendrical requirements. He is certainly wise to express skepticism about recent arguments for the later of those two dates based on a partial eclipse of a "blood moon" visible at

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Jerusalem, and even more sensible to note that astronomical dates for events governed by lunar visibility are far from exact. It is one thing to produce an astronomical chart showing precisely when a lunar cycle *should* begin, and entirely another to calculate when that crescent moon was actually sighted and a new month (e.g. Nisan) was officially inaugurated.

What is surprising is Brown's failure to fully utilize the date of a known *solar* eclipse as a chronological marker in his discussion (pp. 1039-43) of the Lukan "eclipse" during the crucifixion of Jesus. A total eclipse of the sun, *theoretically* visible in the eastern Mediterranean, occurred on 24 November 29 near mid-day. As Brown accurately notes (pp. 1041-42), this is likely to be the eclipse mentioned by Origen and Eusebius (based on an earlier now-lost chronicle of Phlegon of Tralles). But that eclipse has far more significance. Maurice Goguel (*Life of Jesus* [1960, reprint of 1933 ed.] Vol. I. 91-93) long ago suggested that Thallus the Samaritan alluded (in a now-lost book) to the same eclipse in arguing that the crucifixion darkness was natural and not divine. If Goguel's date of c. 50 for Thallus' account is correct, this is the earliest non-Christian reference to a Christian "tradition" regarding the death of Jesus.

More to the point, the 24 November 29 eclipse supports both an A.D. 30 crucifixion date and may provide an explanation for Luke's confused account of an "eclipse" at the time of a Passover full moon. A solar eclipse at Passover is an astronomical impossibility: the earth is at that time *between* sun and moon. But transposing the living memory of an attested solar eclipse in late November to provide a supernatural aspect for an historical event in early April, i.e. events occurring *less than six months apart*, is quite believable. It is more difficult to accept that the eclipse of November, 29 would be linked with an event of 3 April 33, *three and a half years later*. However attractive that explanation seems, it may well be that late autumn clouds or rain might have diminished the full effect of the November, 29 eclipse, and thus it might have no bearing whatsoever on the crucifixion of Jesus. Nor may we confidently consider a Chinese account of a "great darkness" noted there at about this time (p. 1042).



If the darkness associated with the death of Jesus is not entirely a Gospel construct, and we eliminate any association with the solar eclipse of A.D. 29, some other natural phenomenon may lie behind the tradition. In his *Life of Jesus* (II. 542 n. 2) Goguel reproduced the text of a letter from a student who witnessed a severe *khamshin* at Jerusalem between 17 April (Good Friday) and 19 April (Easter Sunday) in 1927. By noon on the Friday a clear blue sky had become shrouded and dark from the effects of clouds and a major sandstorm. That “daytime darkness” endured throughout Friday afternoon and continued all day Saturday. By dawn on Sunday the sky was again clear, in time for a glorious Easter sunrise. Such a coincidence may become miraculous when given a religious or theological context.

## 1. Gethsemane

### ***The Arrest at Gethsemane:***

The apprehension of Jesus at Gethsemane remains among the most problematical of the incidents relating to the Passion. Brown is concerned to demonstrate that the rôle of Judas Iscariot was less that of betrayer than of informer, and he attends carefully (p. 211; 251) to the meaning of παραδιδόναι as it occurs in all four gospel accounts and in Paul. Παραδιδόναι he translates as “to give over”: “Judas gave Jesus over by making it possible to arrest him; there is no evidence that he betrayed secrets” (p. 251). Just what those “secrets” were isn’t discussed. Certainly Brown is correct in thinking (p. 1373) that Paul’s explicit linking of Jesus’ arrest with the eucharistic meal just prior to it “takes us back to Christian thought of the very early days.” The historicity of the “betrayal” of Judas is assured by its inclusion in the PNs. Surely no enemy of the early Church could have concocted a more damning indictment of one who was among the closest associates of Jesus.

Beyond the *intention* of the arrest is the composition of the group which apprehended Jesus. The synoptic accounts indicate that “a crowd” under the aegis of “the chief priests and elders” (Mk, Mat.) and “the captains of the Temple” (Lk) were involved (Luke’s

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expression is given separate treatment in Appendix V ["Jewish authorities in the Passion"] pp. 1430-31). Only John includes a "cohort" under the command of a "tribune" acting in concert with "attendants" associated with "the chief priests and Pharisees." Nevertheless it is customary among biblical scholars, and even Roman historians, to assume that John's detailed account is not only more accurate, but that the cohort and tribune are Roman, dispatched by the *praefectus Iudaeae*, Pilate, to participate in a joint Jewish/Roman arrest.

This is a perfect example of an all-too-common dilemma in NT scholarship regarding the "historicity" of an event in the life of Jesus. Either John was privy to information not available to the synoptics regarding Roman involvement in the arrest, or John embroidered or "enhanced", for theological or polemical purposes, the basic tradition of only Jewish involvement. After exploring both options in some detail, Brown states: "No matter how fascinating the historical implications of the Johannine scene, we have no way of confirming or denying it" (p. 251) and again, "John alone portrays Roman troops in the arresting party, and ... I found it impossible to decide the antiquity or historicity of that portrayal" (p. 308).

Yet even with such disclaimers, Brown exhibits reluctance to reject the idea that Roman forces did in fact participate--even when *John* does not specify Roman troops, and there is no parallel from contemporary sources (Roman or Jewish) for such a joint police action (on this see O. Betz, *ANRW* II 25:1 [1982] p. 613). He presents as a given that in John's account of the arrest "Roman soldiers were involved" (p. 274) and at another point notes that John has Jesus address "... the arresting Roman soldiers and Jewish police attendants ..." (p. 290). It becomes impossible to disentangle what Brown believes about the arrest, and what he thinks John knows.

Twice Brown insists that John uses "technical Roman terminology" (p. 248) and "Roman military terms" (p. 251). Though Greek *σπεῖρα* and *χιλίαρχος* have corresponding Latin equivalents in *cohors* and *tribunus*, respectively, the terms go back to Hellenistic times in their Palestinian/Syrian context and are therefore not particular to the Roman occupying forces in the region (Brown's "tribune" of p. 248, incidentally, is inadvertently demoted to



MacAdam, **Gethsemane**, *IBS* 17, October 1995 “centurion” two pages later). Native Near Eastern armies such as the Nabataean and Herodian had been structured along the lines of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid forces garrisoned throughout the area for centuries. Not only Greek military terms but personal names were borrowed into the local languages, and here perhaps Nabataean Aramaic supplies the best examples.

Macedonian/Greek military terms are well-attested as loan-words in contemporary Nabataean epigraphy (e.g. CIS II # 201 [A.D. 8/9] mentions a *klyrk* (χιλίαρχος); CIS II # 214 [A.D. 39/40] notes a ‘*strtg*’ (στρατηγός) and *hyprk* [ἑπαρχος]; there are many more). The anonymous Greek source *Periplus Mari Erythraei* (composed c. 50) notes a ἑκατοντάρχης supervising affairs at the Red Sea port of Λευκή Κώμη (northwest Saudi Arabia). No one would posit a Roman *centurio* at so remote a place at that time; the customs officer was Nabataean. By the same token the Herodian (later Agrippan) forces also used Graeco-Roman terms for the officers or soldiers of the armies in that client-kingdom. The ἑκατοντάρχης (*centurio*) of Mt. 8:5-13 is in the army of Herod Antipas, not the Roman army (Galilee was outside Roman jurisdiction at the time of this episode). Likewise the χιλίαρχος and *speculator* of Mk. 6:21; 27 (the episode involving the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist) are soldiers in Herod Antipas’ army.

Whether the temple-police within Jerusalem were organized along the same lines is unknown, nor do we know the limits of their jurisdiction. By contrast the limits of *Roman* authority may be gleaned from Jn 8:59 and 10:31. In each incident “the Jews” attempt to stone Jesus. Brown points out that “there was no suggestion that Roman permission was needed for that” (p. 748). Clearly both incidents took place in Judaea/Jerusalem, then under Roman authority. But both are localized by John *inside the temple precincts*, into which Roman authority did not extend. So Brown’s argument collapses, as does his idea that the surrender of Jesus to Pilate is “because the charge is not religious” (*ibid*). Brown opts for Roman jurisdiction “except for certain specified religious and moral crimes where death was the automatic penalty” (*ibid*).

Surely the size of the Johannine forces sent to Gethsemane is worthy of comment. At the very least a σπεῖρα sent against Jesus

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and his friends implies that some stiff and large-scale resistance was expected. Thus it seems strange that only one arrest was made. If Pilate the Roman *praefectus* had contributed a commander and about 500 troops to the arresting party it also seems odd that the prisoner was not taken immediately into *Roman* custody. Nor is Pilate's behavior at the "trial" consistent with that of an official who had agreed to assist in the arrest of the accused. John's scenario here, as elsewhere, is fraught with drama and symbolic portent. He is concerned to present an omnipotent Jesus confronting a large military force, a Jesus who flattens the arresting party with a few words (Jn 18:6) before surrendering of his own volition. John's purpose is to enhance the theological impact of his narrative: Jesus as Λόγος, triumphant in adversity. The military terminology may be accurate, but the force described can only have been a unit of the Jewish temple-police, a detachment of unknown size but surely smaller than a full σπεῖρα (600 men). To implicate the Romans in the arrest of Jesus would actually be counter to the anti-Jewish bias of this Gospel. Jesus was taken into custody at the behest of those who opposed him among the ruling elite of Judea.

## 2. Gabbatha

### ***The Sanhedrin "Hearing" and the Roman "Trial":***

Throughout this portion of the passion narratives Brown argues that the treatment accorded Jesus by both the Jewish and Roman authorities has a close parallel in Flavius Josephus' account (*Jewish War* 6.5.3) of Jesus the son of Ananias, and is in no way similar to Josephus' report (*Antiquities* 20.5.2) of the Roman execution of the two sons of Judas the Galilaean. To that end Brown states: "... Jesus cannot be classified simply as a political revolutionary. He was a troublesome religious figure and was treated as such" (p. 383). That view is neither accurate nor convincing.

In fact there are elements of *both* Josephan accounts in the PNs. Had Jesus of Nazareth been no more "troublesome" than Jesus the son of Ananias he also might have escaped capital punishment and been released as a *meshugannah*. His crucifixion on the orders



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of the governor of Judaea is understandable only if Pontius Pilate was persuaded that Jesus of Nazareth represented a threat to Roman provincial authority. Pilate acted in response to that threat. All four evangelists are in agreement that *rex Iudaeorum* was the charge on the *titulus* above the cross of Jesus. Whether that charge was correct or not, and whether the execution was *de facto* rather than *de jure* punishment, Jesus died the death of a criminal.

In the opinion of Tacitus (*Annales* 15.44), Pilate's action eliminated the leader of a movement which he (Tacitus) considered a "detestable superstition". That statement, relating to Christian implication in the great fire of Rome in 64, may be more than just another example of the historian's famous brevity of expression. As every student of Roman imperial history learns, our received text of the *Annales* has a huge lacuna for the years 29-32 precisely. It is held by some that within the missing passages was an earlier and even more unflattering report on the death of Jesus edited out by Christian copyists. On this see (e.g.) E. Bammel and C.F.D. Moule, *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (1984) p. 29 note 155.

The extant view of Tacitus is borne out by the witness of the most notorious and controversial passage in the Josephan corpus, the *Testimonium Flavianum* (*Antiquities* 18.3.3) While it was once possible to ignore the entire disputed passage, very recent and reasonable assessments (notably J.P. Meier, *CBQ* 52 [1990] 76-103) have demonstrated a Josephan "core" imbedded within a later (pro-Christian) overlay to the existing summary of the career and death of Jesus of Nazareth. That "core" specifies that within the Jewish community some "high-ranking men" (πρώτοι ἄνδρες) were responsible for the process by which Jesus was ultimately executed by the Roman authority in Judaea. Brown is judicious in his treatment of this (pp. 373-76), clearly delineating the portions of the *Testimonium* which he feels are genuine.

What Brown does *not* do is emphasize two striking omissions in Josephus' account, one minor (no identification of Jesus by patronym or origin) and one major (no mention of a formal charge against Jesus by either Jewish or Roman authorities). Josephus' failure to specify the ἐνδειξις (indictment) is exceedingly problematical, much more so than Tacitus' laconic statement (noted

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above) about the “execution” (no charge specified) of Christus in the procuratorship of Pilate. Regarding Josephus, either we must accept that an educated Jew who was born in the same decade as Jesus’ crucifixion did not know the reason for Jesus’ condemnation and execution, or that the stated reason was suppressed or modified by later Christian copyists.

We may credit Josephus for knowing what the issue had been: Jesus was one of a number of false messiah-kings. That unflattering (but probably accurate) opinion was later reworded, becoming the affirmative, quite pro-Christian, declarative statement now in the passage: “He [Jesus] was the Messiah.” Perhaps that would be a satisfactory reply to J. P. Meier’s concern voiced so recently: “It is curious that Josephus, while so detailed in his explanation of why John [the Baptist] was executed, is totally silent on the precise reason why the Jewish leaders accused Jesus before Pilate and why Pilate decided to crucify him” (*A Marginal Jew* II (1994) p. 99 note #189). It is worth noting that the Nicene Creed itself says only: *sub Pontio Pilato passus* (“suffered under Pontius Pilate”). No indictment, no verdict and, most striking, *no Jewish implication* in the death of Jesus. Perhaps it is not the “silence” of Josephus we should note, but that of the Nicene Council on the issue of responsibility. There is not a hint of anti-Jewish bias in the Creed.

### ***The Sanhedrin “Hearing”:***

Brown accepts that Jesus was interrogated by the Sanhedrin prior to a transfer to the Roman authorities. The composition and function of the Jerusalem council is best known from Josephus: “If there is any difference in Josephus’ mind between ‘Boulê’ and ‘Sanhedrin’, it may be that he thought of the latter almost as the proper name or title of the Jerusalem boulê” (p. 347). It is difficult if not impossible to know how the Jewish authorities of 30/33 viewed the itinerant preacher from Galilee. Some of the hostility displayed in the Gospel accounts may indeed reflect the attitude of synagogogue hierarchies toward Christian communities several generations removed from the events of Jesus’ lifetime.

But surely some rancor was generated during the ministry of Jesus, and not only at the highest levels of Judaism. Is the murderous



MacAdam, **Gethsemane**, *IBS* 17, October 1995 hostility to Jesus displayed by his fellow-villagers in Nazareth (Lk. 4:28-30) simply an exaggeration of what is related elsewhere (Mk. 6:1-6 or Mt. 13:54-58; cf. Jn. 6:42)? Whether Jesus had any special status within the Jewish community of his time is also uncertain. "Rabbi" was not a commonly-attested title within Palestinian Judaism before A.D. 70 (see pp. 253-54 note 18 for Brown's review of the archaeological and epigraphical evidence attesting the term).

We are also at a loss to know if the Sanhedrin scenario is a conflation of *several* meetings into one hearing (presented later as hastily convened) to simplify and dramatize the events of the final day in the life of Jesus. Brown is circumspect on this issue, but his thorough examination of the Gospel accounts underscores the serious pitfalls of a rush to judgment on the issue of the legality of the proceedings: "The clarity and force of the unified trial presentation has moved and been remembered by hundreds of millions; the awkwardnesses have bothered a handful of scholars subjecting the narrative to microscopic examination" (p. 560).

The double-edged issue of "Messiah/Kingship" predominates the proceedings, and Brown attends carefully to it throughout his commentary (esp. pp. 473-480). He suggests the historicity of that equivalence as the basis of a charge which carried extreme weight in both Jewish and Roman law (p. 559 and note 33). Some clear indication of just how many "false messiahs" or "pretender-kings" had surfaced in Palestinian Judaism in the first century would help us to see this phenomenon in context. Therefore a reference (e.g.) to R. A. Horsley and J. S. Hansen, *Bandits, Prophets and Messiahs. Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (1986) would have been helpful. Nevertheless Brown states clearly:

I judge it plausible that during Jesus' lifetime some of his followers thought him to be the Messiah ... Jesus, confronted with this identification, responded ambivalently because associated with that role were features that he rejected and because God had yet to define the role that he would play in the kingdom beyond what he was already doing. Such an indefinite and ambivalent answer could have constituted the

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basis on which his enemies gave him over to the Romans as would-be king (p. 480).

Brown's discussion of the "revolutionary" aspect of Jesus' public career comes down hard on what he terms "media hype" (pp. 677-78), a modern genre of scholarship perhaps best exemplified by S.G.F. Brandon. This promotes Jesus as either a nationalist firebrand or a peasant liberator, either of which "... can be presented with enthusiasm and does not require radio, newspaper or t.v. presenters to take a stance about Jesus' religious claims that might offend viewers" (p. 678). In that light the *verba Christi* which occur throughout the Gospels are the ancient equivalents of "sound bites" in today's t.v. news, and the Greek transliterations of several Aramaic words and phrases are the *ipsissima verba* of those excerpted quotes.

Brown nowhere discusses the episode of the "triumphal entry into Jerusalem" or "cleansing" of the Temple" as possible *points d'appui* for the Jewish or Roman authorities to bring charges of religious or civil disorder against Jesus and his followers. Those, and the στάσις referred to by Mark 15:7, may or may not be related, but could have provided those opposed to Jesus with precisely the circumstances for formulating a religious charge with political (i.e. anti-Roman) overtones. In Josephus' account of Jesus son of Ananias it is the prophecies of doom upon the city (including the Temple) that prompt the Jewish authorities to hand him over to the Roman governor. If the "Temple-cleansing" episode was in fact a foreshadowing of that sanctuary's destruction, the parallel of the two Jesus' is more apparent.

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## **Excursus: Anti-Judaism in the PNs:**

Somewhat buried in Brown's "Introduction" to a solid study on "Background for the Jewish Trial/Interrogation of Jesus by the Priestly Authorities" (pp. 328-397) is a splendid fourteen-page (pp. 383-397) essay on the relevant topic of anti-Judaism. Brown has entitled it "Responsibility and/or Guilt for the Death of Jesus", but so



complex and detailed is the arrangement of *The Death of the Messiah* that no hint of it can be found in the Table of Contents. It is noted in the Index (p. 1557) under "Anti-Judaism" (to the Index references under "anti-semitism" [sic] add p. 1336). So important is this essay that it should have appeared among the topics given separate treatment in appendices. It should become required reading for anyone, especially clerics, professing faith in the Judaeo-Christian-Muslim tradition.

It is to Brown's credit that he distinguishes between the terms "anti-Judaism" and "anti-Semitism", the latter of which is a nineteenth-century German philological/racial construct and inaccurate today even when utilized by Jews. Brown may believe, with S.J.D. Cohen (*From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* [1987] 47-8), that racism did not exist in antiquity, but anti-Judaism certainly did. As intelligent and educated a Roman as Marcus Tullius Cicero summed up (*De Prov. Cons.* 5.10) his negative views about Jews and Syrians thus: *Iudeis et Syris, nationibus natis servituti*. In that inclusive sense Cicero was truly an anti-Semite: his disdain embraces Jews and other native near easterners ("Syrian" could mean Phoenician, Ituraean, Edessan, Nabataean, Palmyrene, etc.).

Brown's essay begins with a general introduction on anti-Judaism within Christianity from Patristic times to the Second Vatican Council's denunciation of it a generation ago. That is followed by separate comments on "Anti-Judaism in the Passion Narratives of the Four Gospels" and concludes with "Observations about Jewish Involvement in the Death of Jesus". Brown clearly states that he included this essay in the face of suggestions that he omit it:

[S]ome have advised me against devoting even these few pages to the issue. They have warned me that whatever I write will be dismissed as Christian self-justification or inadequate. I would do better, they tell me, to treat the antiJewish issue as I treated the implications of the passion for Christian spirituality and for the systematic theology of the redemption, namely, as very important subjects that lie outside the scope of a book dedicated to commenting on what the Gospels report (p. 386).

Brown is quite forthright in suggesting that Jesus himself, in what he said and did within his own Jewish religious community, provoked distrust, suspicion, envy and, ultimately, malice. The priestly hierarchy at Jerusalem was moved to take action against Jesus, certainly prompted by his disruption of Temple services and the associated warning about the destruction of that edifice. It follows that the Roman governor of Judaea was persuaded (rightly or wrongly) that Jesus represented a threat to civil order in the province. The action of certain Jews with specific grievances against Jesus is, by the time of the *Gospel of John*, transferred and intensified to a condemnation of *all* Jews of the diaspora (particularly the synagogue hierarchy of the Johannine community) in the decades after the first Jewish War. Brown makes much of this, not in the essay but in his Appendix V: "Jewish Groups Mentioned in the Passion Narratives":

By using 'the Jews' to refer to those hostile to Jesus John identifies the synagogue authorities and their followers of the last third of the [first] century (as encountered in the history of the Johannine community) as the heirs of the authorities and populace who were hostile to Jesus in Judea and Galilee during his lifetime (p. 1423 note 10).

And in a reference to the de-Judaizing tendency of John, Brown states: "[John] 18:36 is very Johannine in having Jesus speak of 'the Jews' in such an alienated way that one would not suspect that he [Jesus] himself was Jewish. This is the language of the Johannine Christians expelled from the synagogue" (p. 750). Such "Gentilization" of Jesus in the fourth Gospel has an exact modern parallel in the Hollywood tendency to "Nordicize" or "Aryanize" Jesus in film biographies. Notable as fair-haired, blue-eyed screen Christs are Jeffrey Hunter in "King of Kings" (1962), Max von Sydow in "The Greatest Story Ever Told" (1965), Robert Powell in "Jesus of Nazareth" (1977) and Willem Dafoe in "The Last Temptation of Christ" (1989). We will probably see a similar version before this decade is done. That anti-Judaism exists in the minds of ignorant folk is no surprise. Far more frightening is its presence in

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the minds of intelligent and educated people. We are fortunate to have the thoughts of a respected and deeply sensitive scholar on an issue of fundamental importance. It is appropriate that the closing statement of this “excursion” be in Brown’s own words:

There is antiJudaism in the NT as a result of polemics between Jews who believed in Jesus and those who did not, but it is more restrained than that of *G[ospel of] Pet[er]* and *Barnabas*. This is an instance of what I think of as a larger truth: Frequently among ordinary Christians there was (and is) more hostility toward Jews than detectable among official spokesmen--a situation that may have been true, vice versa, in Judaism as well, if we may judge from comparing the more official Mishna and Talmuds with the popular *Toledoth Yeshu*. Several times I have cited passion plays as examples of the tendency to enrich the stories of Jesus’ death with *popular* imagination, and often a strong antiJudaism appears in those plays (p. 1347 note 62).

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## The Roman “Trial”:

The transferral of Jesus from Jewish to Roman authority is treated abruptly in the Gospel accounts, and Brown is aware of that. “The lack of verbal connection between the charges in the Sanhedrin trial and the charge known to Pilate probably would give the impression that Pilate was deceived by the Sanhedrin authorities. Yet the gap is not so sharp as to make the storyline implausible, for in a way ‘the Messiah’ and ‘the King of the Jews’ can be looked on as diverse facets of a common theme” (p. 732). And again: “They [the Jewish authorities] are playing on the fears of a Roman governor that this Jew [Jesus] may be trying to restore a kingdom that Rome had supplanted twenty-five years before, and by so doing challenge the Emperor” (p. 740).

The location of Pilate’s *praetorium* in Jerusalem, and therefore of the Aramaic place-name *Gabbatha* (a hill or raised area) and the Λιθόστρωτος (pavement) associated with it (both at Jn 19:13), is given due attention by Brown (pp. 705-10). Present



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consensus now favors the Herodian Palace which once stood on the highest level of the walled city, rather than the Antonia Fortress near the Temple or the older Hasmonaean Palace between the two. Brown fails to note that the term *praetorium* was not the designation of a building, but that building's official *function* whenever the *praefectus/procurator* was in residence. The term is transliterated as προιτώριον only in Mark (15:16), to specify which αὐλή (palace) of several palaces in Jerusalem was Pilate's residence at this time (on this see now J. Marcus, *JBL* 111 [1992] 445). That is but one of several indications that Mark was writing for a Syro-Palestinian, rather than a Roman audience: why specify to readers who presumably knew little or nothing about the topography of Jerusalem?

In dissecting verse by verse the Roman "trial" narrative in the PNs, Brown comes close to behaving as though he has in front of him a verbatim transcript of the proceedings, every nuance of which can be analyzed (see pp. 740-41 for examples). This is ironic given Brown's clearly stated opinion of such a document existing in antiquity: "... the thesis that a written record of the trial existed in the Roman archives is a fiction, despite later patristic references to it" (p. 753). Nevertheless Brown is straightforward in his approach: "There is only one real question and that is the theme of the whole trial; beyond the King[ship?] issue the many other things are subordinate and irrelevant, and that is why Jesus answers to them nothing at all" (p. 734). For Greek as the language in which the proceedings were probably conducted see *BARev* 18 (1992) 60-61.

From the initial presentation of Jesus to Pilate until the affixing of the *titulus* on the cross the issue of Jesus as *rex Iudaeorum* dominates the Gospel narratives. Working backward from the *titulus* to the "trial" seems to be the best approach, since neither the Gospels nor other sources offer a "verdict" or a formal sentence by Pilate (the wording of the *titulus* is discussed on p. 476 and p. 478). Brown presents us with a carefully orchestrated set of statements on the accusation of Jesus' claim to kingship: "I think there is an historical kernel in the Roman trial: Pilate sentenced Jesus to die on the cross on the charge of being 'the King of the Jews'" (p. 725). Brown is aware that Pilate's question "Are you the King of the

Jews?" and Jesus' response "You say so" are worded *exactly alike* in the Greek of all four Gospels: "That is almost unique in the PNs ..." (p. 727). 250 pages later, in a discussion of discrete portions of the various narratives of the crucifixion, Brown reiterates with emphasis: "I see no convincing objection to its (i.e. the *titulus*) historicity as the expression of the charge on which the Romans executed Jesus" (p. 968).

That the public actions and statements of Jesus within his own religious community may have had a marked political impact is also given due attention. Though for Brown "[t]he Roman issue [i.e. regarding Jesus] has a political tone" (p. 729), it is not that simple: "Historically the situation may have been far more complicated, for both the destruction of the sanctuary and the claim to be the Messiah would have had political implications" (p. 729 note 3). Again: "Thus in 1st cent. Palestine the charge that Jesus was claiming that title ["King of the Jews"] might well be understood by the Romans as an attempt to reestablish the kingship over Judea and Jerusalem [formerly] exercised by the Hasmonaeans ... and Herod the Great" (p. 731).

With that in mind it is perhaps a bit easier to understand the implications of the exchange between "the Jews" and Pontius Pilate regarding the exact words of the *titulus* in Jn. 19:21-22. Pilate wants the public to know he found the condemned guilty as charged. To mince words might lead to suspicions that Jesus was executed on the strength of a false accusation. (On the wording of the trilingual *titulus*, see P.L. Maier, 'The Inscription on the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth', *Hermes* ([1995] in press). Thus the blunt reply of a harrassed governor· ὁ γέγραφα, γέγραφα, which in the Vulgate's *Quod scripsi, scripsi* is two syllables less voluble. Pilate's curt, laconic phrase foreshadows that of a later time and very different circumstance: *Roma locuta, causa finita*.

Pilate himself remains enigmatic. Until 1961 we knew of him only from the scattered accounts in the Christian and non-Christian literary tradition. But that year a fragmentary Latin inscription bearing his name and at least one of his titles was found in excavations at Caesarea (Israel). That has been widely publicized, as the relevant portion of Brown's sectional bibliography (pp. 666-8)

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attests. Oddly missing from that list is a citation of the ingenious and plausible reconstruction of the Pilatus inscription by G. Labbé in *RÉA* 93 (1991) 277-99. Labbé maintains that the word *Tiberieum* in line 1, taken to be a substantive and referring to a structure, is instead an adjective modifying the preceding word of which only traces of a final “S” remain on the stone: perhaps *opus* or *nemus*, or as Labbé argues, *munus* (a gift or donation, or some public service rendered):

[Munu]s Tiberieum  
[Pon]tius Pilatus  
[Praef]ectus Iuda[ea]e  
[f]e[cit]

Whatever the case, this remains the only epigraphic attestation of any of Judaea’s governors before the Jewish War of 66-74 and is significant for that reason alone.

As in the Gethsemane episode, it is John’s account of the Roman proceedings which compels the attention of the reader. It also recently served as the focus of an examination of the trial by a prominent Roman historian, Fergus Millar (*Tribute to Geza Vermes* [1990] 355-81) who stated that John offers us “... the best account which we have of the steps which led to the crucifixion” (p. 366). Indeed it may, but John’s trial narrative could be just as driven by theological concerns as is his account of the arrest of Jesus. We may benefit from Brown’s cautionary statements on this very issue: “... the Johannine account of the Roman trial [is] one of the master dramatic constructions in this Gospel” (p. 743), and some pages later: “John has given us the *chef d’oeuvre* of early Christian drama, unfolding with perspicacity the confrontation of the divine and human” (p. 759).

Whether Luke had similar intentions in his account of Jesus being sent to Herod Antipas by Pilate is a separate issue. Brown does “... contend that Herod conducted an ἀνάκρισις or preliminary investigation, in which procedure he would return the prisoner to the governor with an evaluation” (p. 737). Luke’s parallel with the “double-trial” of Paul before Festus and Agrippa I (Acts 25;26) has



long been obvious. There are no examples of “dual” provincial trials from non-Christian literature. There *are* parallels for Matthew’s account of the dream of Pilate’s wife. Though her name, *Claudia Procula*, is known only from later, apocryphal Christian literature, it is worth noting here that a bracelet-inscription in Greek, attesting the name *Klaudia Prokla*, has recently been re-dated to the first half of the first century A.D. The bracelet is associated with a lead sarcophagus found in a hillside family burial plot near Beirut, Lebanon. See J. Carington-Smith, *Antichthon* 18 (1984) 102-07.

### **The “Barabbas Episode”:**

This episode is critical for a number of reasons, not least the leverage given to Pilate regarding the fate of Jesus. Without Barabbas to present as a choice between two prisoners, Pilate alone must decide the issue of Jesus’ death. Barabbas allows Pilate to put that decision in the hands of “the crowd”. The dilemma for us is whether Barabbas is a *malus ex machina* invented for effect, or a historical figure imprisoned for involvement in a local civil disturbance. Barabbas’ rôle is more critical than (e.g.) that of Simon of Cyrene, who could be omitted from John’s account for theological reasons. Barabbas is more like Joseph of Arimathea: his brief appearance resolves a difficulty. Barabbas is introduced abruptly by Mark, who makes it very clear (15:7) he is connected with “the *stasis*” (rendered as *seditio* in the Vulgate) in Jerusalem sometime prior to this day. Some lesser texts of Matthew render his name as Jesus Barabbas, further complicating matters.

John’s account of Barabbas calls him a ληστής, a bandit. B discusses the term ληστής/λησταῖ on pp. 283-84 and again at 686-88, but makes no reference to either B.D. Shaw, “Bandits in the Roman Empire” (*P&P* 105 [1984] 3-52) or to B. Isaac, “Bandits in Judaea and Arabia” (*HSCP* 88 [1984] 171-203) in spite of citing Sean Freyne’s “Bandits in Galilee” (1988) in the bibliography on p. 665. Though there are several attested instances of pardons or amnesties granted by Roman governors (summarized by Brown on pp. 816-7), none is connected with a festival custom as is the Barabbas episode, and none involves a prisoner sentenced to death. Thus the *privilegium paschale* of the Gospels remains an enigma.

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Brown's summation is judicious: Pilate's release of Barabbas is a "historical memory; however, that need not include the custom of a release during the feast or the close relationship between the release of Barabbas and the condemnation of Jesus" (p. 753 note 44).

Mark's reference to "the *stasis*" in the city implies to me that two probably unrelated incidents (a civil disturbance; the temple "cleansing" by Jesus) occurred almost simultaneously. Fairly or not, Jesus may have been accused of implication in *both*: the temple authorities could charge him with messianic pretensions, and Pilate with civil insurrection. "King of the Jews" neatly combines both charges: pseudo-messiah and pretender-king. Barabbas was said to be associated with "*the* riot". Mark's use of the definite article implies that his audience knows *which* riot. Surely readers in Syria-Palestine might make such a distinction, but who in Rome would know? Neither Barabbas' role in a riot, nor whether he was a convicted criminal awaiting execution, is made clear. If the Roman governors of Judaea on occasion granted amnesty at the Passover festival Josephus knew nothing about it. On that issue his silence *is* significant.

The accounts of Jesus before Pilate have a particular fascination because they represent the intersection of Roman imperial and Jewish provincial affairs at a specific moment in time. This alone doesn't make them unique, but their detailed witness does even if the narrative might be inaccurate, biased or confused. Each account is, therefore, problematical in and of itself, in relation to the other three gospels, and in the light of anything else known about Roman/Jewish legal procedure. That is precisely what makes this historical episode attractive and frustrating at one and the same time. Two centuries of intense scholarly attention (biblical and classical) have not produced a consensus of opinion which would satisfy Von Ranke's quest for *wie es eigentlich gewesen* ("what has actually happened"). We would need new primary source material for that.

### 3. Golgotha

#### ***The Crucifixion and the Burial:***

We know a little more about this form of execution in the Roman world due to an accidental archaeological discovery in Israel in the late 1960s. The first century A.D. remains of a crucified Jew name Yehohanan were exhumed, recorded, and then reburied. Unfortunately this was done hastily, and even more regretfully that haste generated much silly and speculative analysis about the mechanics of this particular crucifixion (notably Y. Yadin, *IEJ* 23 [1973] 19-22). Even Hollywood responded: Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ" (1989) featured a truly grotesque crucifixion scenario based on these scholarly misinterpretations. Brown offers instead two comprehensive and very intelligent discussions of the archaeological/historical (pp. 945-52) and medical (pp. 1088-92) evidence for Roman crucifixion.

Brown's exposition (pp. 1205-1234) of the Joseph of Arimathea episode is quite exemplary from beginning to end. The historicity of it is assured by the simple logic that the earliest Christian community knew well that *not one* of Jesus' closest associates was able to provide him with a burial-place. That has as much to do with the flight of "The Twelve" from Gethsemane as it does to the reality that the speed and sequence of events (the arrest, the trials, the crucifixion) overtook their ability to plan in advance for this tragic outcome to the Jerusalem ministry of Jesus.

The closing verses of chapter 15 of the *Gospel of Mark* are therefore especially resonant in that they are perhaps the very earliest account of how "the remembering community" assessed the impact of the death of Jesus: Mk. 15:45 says simply [Pilatos] ἐδώρησατο τὸ πτώμα (= "[Pilate] granted the corpse") to Joseph of Arimathea. In its bluntness the phrase is characteristic of Mark, and as Brown observes (p. 1221 note 40) the Greek phrase may be a faithful rendering of the more legalistic Latin *donavit cadaver* (somewhat muted to *donavit corpus* in the Vulgate). For Matthew and Luke, who provide infancy narratives, the apposition of a Joseph present at the birth and death of Jesus is fortuitous, but there is no attempt by



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either to enhance the coincidence. Brown's comment on this (p. 1228 note 58) is less certain about the "accidental" aspect of the similarity of names.

Brown ponders (p. 1228) how Joseph of Arimathea could condone the Sanhedrin's conviction of Jesus and still be among those "awaiting the kingdom". Joseph may not have participated in the Sanhedrin's interrogation; but see Brown's note 61 on that page. The location of Golgotha/Calvary and Jesus' place of burial is judiciously reviewed (pp. 1279-1283). Recent excavation within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre indicates that an abandoned stone quarry lies beneath the subsequent Roman temple and Christian sanctuaries. That quarry must have been just outside the pre-Agrippan walls of Jerusalem, perhaps near the Genath ("Garden") Gate known to Josephus. Hence John's remark that Jesus' tomb was near a garden. This is given support by many contemporary inscriptions which attest cemeteries and gardens in proximity (see *PPUAES* III A #800.6 [Greek] and *ILS* #8345 ff. [Latin]).

No other proposed site for the tomb of Jesus has nearly as good a claim as this. Brown's closing statement on that topic is worth reproducing in full:

... And beneath nearly 1,700 years of architectural endeavors, not visible to the pilgrim's eye, which sees a marble covering, there are still the very meager remnants from the walls of a cave that has the best claim to have been the burial place hewn out of rock into which a pious Sanhedrist placed the corpse of the crucified Jesus. (p. 1283).

## Conclusion

How close can we get to the events of the last day in the life of Jesus? Paul was perhaps the closest in time and place and it is all the more regrettable that he was unconcerned with the historical aspects. His desire to "question Peter" (ἱστορήσαι [Κηφᾶν] = *videre [Petrum]*) in Gal. 1:18 afforded him a chance to confront a contemporary witness to events (p. 618). But even knowing that Paul

had access to an eyewitness how can we distinguish in Paul what is historical? How then can we do the same for the Gospels? This very difficulty was already evident by the time Eusebius of Caesarea produced his *History of the Church* in the fourth century. Eusebius was a native of Palestine and even he couldn't add a single item of "biographical" information, outside the NT, to the life and times of Jesus, and little enough to the history of the nascent Christian community before the advent of the first Jewish War in 66. However limited as historical records the Gospel PNs are, they remain the major primary sources for the death of Jesus. We must work with what we have.

In Brown's "Appendix II: Dating the Crucifixion" is the refreshing statement "Except for the romantic few who think that Jesus did not die on the cross but woke up in the tomb and ran off to India with Mary Magdalene, most scholars accept the uniform testimony of the Gospels that Jesus died during the Judean prefecture of Pontius Pilate, which is usually dated between A.D. 26 and 36" (p. 1373). Equally salutary is Brown's refusal to step into the chronological quicksand of attempting to harmonize the discordant chronologies of the Synoptics and John: "[M]y judgment is that the various attempts to reconcile the chronological discrepancies between the Synoptics and John are implausible, unnecessary, and misleading. The two Gospel traditions have given us irreconcilable chronological notices. Logically, then, neither or only one set of notices can be historical" (p. 1369). Did *any* evangelist have "personal knowledge" of the date of Jesus' death? Probably not. Here again Brown does not mince words: "One can doubt that without descending into the nihilism of assuming that no writer knew or cared about anything that happened in Jesus' passion" (p. 1361 note 20).

By medieval times, Christian tradition associated Jesus' birth with a stable-cave (under the Church of the Nativity in the village of Bethlehem), and his death with a sepulchre-cave (under the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the nearby city of Jerusalem). Both events were thus imbued with the ancient Roman virtue of *humilitas*. It is worth remembering that the words "humus" and "humble" are

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from the same root that gives us “humility”, and it is fitting that the word “human” also derives from it.

Nowhere else in the NT canon is the *humanity* of Jesus more evident than in the Gospel PNs, from his anguished prayer for deliverance in Gethsemane, to the physical abuse endured by him at Gabbatha, through his cry of despair from Golgotha. Nowhere else are the frailties and failings of his closest friends more evident: the inability to stay awake in the garden, the betrayal by Judas, the denials of Peter. At Calvary only a few women friends witnessed his death; the inclusion there of his mother and a male disciple in *John* 19:26 would appear to be a later and deliberate theological construct. *The Death of the Messiah* is certain to remain the standard work on this topic well into the next century. Because of it we may be a little more optimistic that the “quest for the historical Jesus” is not a hopeless and fruitless search. Prof. J. P. Meier may be correct in stating very recently that “... the chasm of two millenia makes verification of what a 1st century marginal Jew did in a marginal province at the eastern end of the Roman empire extremely difficult” (see *A Marginal Jew* II (1994) 517). Difficult, yes. But not impossible.

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### Postscript

In a publication of such length and complexity I have found very few typographical mistakes or other minor oversights. I note here the following so that a new edition might rectify them. The reference to the 1949 edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (p. 332 note 6) looks a bit out-of-date in light of the edition published in 1972. There is inadvertent reversal of the “revised” dates of Pilate’s prefecture (p. 694-95 note 43). Greek ἐθνῶν should be ἐθνῆ (nominative plural neuter) at p. 386 note 236. The term is spelled correctly on p. 779. In the first line of the last paragraph on p. 1224,



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“exercised” should read “excised”. The following abbreviations were used:

ANRW = Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt

BARev = Biblical Archaeologist Review

CBQ = Catholic Biblical Quarterly

CIS = Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum

CSR = Christian Scholars Review

HSCP = Harvard Studies in Classical Philology

IEJ = Israel Exploration Journal

ILS = Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae

JBL = Journal of Biblical Literature

NTS = New Testament Studies

P&P= Past and Present

PPAES = Publications of the Princeton Archaeological Expeditions  
to Syria

RÉA = Revue des Études Anciennes

## ABSTRACT

Raymond Brown's *Death of the Messiah* (1994) is the most comprehensive and detailed examination, in any language, of the Gospel passion narratives. This review article is contributed by a historian who specializes in the study of the Graeco-Roman Near East. In it he examines and evaluates Fr. Brown's utilization of all the evidence relevant to the final day in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

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Notable is the reviewer's detailed argument against Roman involvement in the arrest at Gethsemane, and the emphasis on Brown's eloquent and courageous essay on the subject of anti-Judaism in the New Testament in general, and in the passion narratives in particular

## EXCUSES, EXCUSES: THE PARABLE OF THE BANQUET (LUKE 14:15-24) WITHIN THE LARGER CONTEXT OF LUKE

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Excuses, excuses, you hear them every day;  
The Devil, he'll supply them, if from church you stay away.  
When people come to know the Lord, the devil always loses,  
So to keep them folks away from church, he offers them  
excuses.<sup>1</sup>

This paper proposes a fresh reading of the Parable of the Banquet (Luke 14:15-24) on the basis of patterns of repetition throughout Luke as a whole. In particular, I will emphasize Luke's repetition of excuses or opportunities for excuses in clusters of three.

It goes without saying that this reading is not the only possible one of this text. It is, like all other readings, the result of the interaction of one reader's particular set of questions and techniques with a text. While other modern interpretations treat the parable as a unit unto itself, or connect it to the rest of Luke thematically, I propose a complex rhetorical operation by which this text is one section of Luke's larger intricate weaving. My intent is not to destruct other reading strategies, but to demonstrate how the posing of a different question can lead to enlightening results.

### Repetition in Greco-Roman Literature

Repetition played a crucial role in ancient rhetoric and literature. In contrast to modern *readers* who are expected to remember all they have read,<sup>2</sup> ancient *hearers* had to be reminded. Such reminders were necessary because ancient literature was produced more for the ears of an audience than for its eyes. Since texts were read aloud both privately (Acts 8:30) and publicly (Rev 1:3), it was necessary for speakers and

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<sup>1</sup> Southern gospel song.

<sup>2</sup> S. S. Lanser (*The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* [Princeton: Princeton University, 1981] 180-181) argues that the degree zero narratee is 'able to remember all that has been told.'



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authors to develop various ways of saying the same thing more than once. Ancient rhetoric featured repetition of sounds, words, phrases, periods, and themes, ranging from literal duplication to allusion. As *Rhetorica ad Herennium* put it, 'there inheres in the repetition an elegance which the ear can distinguish more easily than words can explain' (4.14.21).<sup>3</sup> The same work even included a scheme for varying themes: 'Refining consists in dwelling on the same topic and yet seeming to say something ever new' (4.42.54-4.44.58). Variation was desirable because excessive exact repetition was considered boring.

Ancient authors understood that repetition was worth its trouble in achieving comprehension.<sup>4</sup> Paul uses this mechanism overtly:

But even if we or an angel from heaven preaches to you contrary to that which we preached to you, let that one be accursed. As we said before, so also I say again, if someone preaches to you contrary to that which you received, let that one be accursed (Gal 1:8-9).

Another NT example of this process is the juxtaposition of similar parables and miracle stories (e.g., Matt 13:31-33; Mark 6:30-44, with 8:1-10 and 8:14-21).

Though some may object to the application of ancient rhetorical theory to narrative forms such as the Gospels, I would argue that it is appropriate for two reasons. First, ancient critics themselves sometimes made the same move, using rhetoric to analyze other forms of discourse.<sup>5</sup> Second, most people who could write in the hellenistic world had learned to do so through rhetorical training; even persons who were not educated had often heard public oratory. Indeed, writers of historiography and biography constructed their work through rhetorical techniques.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Quotations from *Rhetorica ad Herennium* are taken from the translation by H. Caplan, *Cicero: Ad C. Herennium* (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1954).

<sup>4</sup> Demetrius, *On Style*, 4.197.

<sup>5</sup> G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984) 13.

<sup>6</sup> W. van Unnik, 'First Century A. D. Literary Culture and Early Christian Literature,' *Protocol of the First Colloquy: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture* (Berkeley:

## Patterns of Repetition in Luke

Readers of Luke-Acts have long noted that patterns of repetition are a common feature of the works. Whether they read Luke-Acts as a single work or as two related works, many authors have demonstrated Luke's tendency to vary diction and other means of expression from one context to another as well as within single contexts. As early as 1901, J. H. Ropes noted that:

Luke varies words in the same context, varies expressions in distant contexts, and even varies larger units of material in distant contexts (e.g., Paul's conversion is reported three times in Acts).

Ropes saw these patterns as evidence for Luke's literary competence as well as for the assigning of Luke-Acts to one author.<sup>7</sup>

H. J. Cadbury's article on Lucan style follows the work of Ropes.<sup>8</sup> Cadbury couples Luke's use of variation with his fondness for repetition (also of words, phrases, and scenes). We should note, however, that Cadbury argues that repeated scenes are less common in Luke than in Acts.<sup>9</sup> Though he does not discuss it in detail, Cadbury also mentions that repetition and variation were general features of ancient rhetorical practice.<sup>10</sup> From the work of Ropes and Cadbury, we may say that scholars have long known that Luke often repeats words, phrases, and even scenes, but is careful to do so with variation.

More contemporary scholars have noted these patterns on a larger scale, what L. T. Johnson calls parallelism.<sup>11</sup> Thus, both Luke and Acts begin with the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (of Mary in

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Graduate Theological Union and University of California, 1970) 6-7; D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 30-31.

<sup>7</sup> 'An Observation on the Style of S. Luke,' *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 12 (1901) 299-305.

<sup>8</sup> 'Four Features of Lucan Style,' in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Fortress edition; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 87-102.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>11</sup> *The Gospel of Luke*, (Sacra Pagina, vol. 3; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991) 14.

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Luke and of Mary and the disciples in Acts), Peter and Paul share similar experiences, and Stephen's trial resembles that of Jesus. According to Johnson, this device both makes connections among Luke's main characters and creates an unspecified 'dynamic tension between discrete parts of his narrative.'

Johnson's concept could easily be stretched. For example, the shutting of Zechariah's mouth in Luke 1:20 and the freeing of his tongue in 1:64 could be studied in relation to the more familiar resting of tongues upon the believers in Acts 2:3. In other words, Luke's use of repetition and variation may be just as much thematic as stylistic, and may be carefully designed for rhetorical effect. That is precisely what I propose in relation to the Parable of the Banquet.

## Modern Interpretations

Outside of commentaries and parable research, the Parable of the Banquet has not received much attention; when it is treated, it is often related to its Lucan context only thematically, even in literary-critical readings. A survey of modern scholarship reveals three primary lines of interpretation, though the boundaries between these are often blurred. First, some interpreters have emphasized the parable's invitation to the eschatological banquet. Though the parable does address *who* attends the banquet, some readers emphasize the universality of the invitation over the exclusion of the original invitees.<sup>12</sup>

Second, some highlight the polemical dimension of the parable. Such readings locate the parable as a warning either to the Jews or to the rich. Those who say the parable speaks against the Jewish leaders often associate it with Luke's salvation-history theme which points to the mission to the gentiles; those who discern a warning to the rich note a dimension of reversal: 'The reversal of the humble and those who exalt

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<sup>12</sup> E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Luke* (trans. D. E. Green; Atlanta: John Knox, 1984) 237-239; D. L. Tiede, *Luke* (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988) 268; J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXIV* (AB 28A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1981) 1052-1053. Tiede and Fitzmyer subordinate this dimension to the third emphasis cited below, the urgency of the invitation.



Carey, *Excuses*, *IBS* 17, October 1995 themselves in 14:11 is mirrored in the parable by the replacement of people of social position and wealth with beggars off the street.<sup>13</sup>

Third, some have seen the parable as expressing the urgency of discipleship or the necessity of responding to Jesus. The original invitees have squandered their only opportunity. Linking the parable with 2 Cor 6:2 ('Now is the acceptable time'), E. Linnemann stresses the 'now' of the invitation: 'Anyone who is not willing to be summoned to the first course, does not get to taste of the meal proper.'<sup>14</sup> And C. F. Evans adds that the excuses demonstrate the way 'economic and social attachments' can hinder response to Jesus' messianic invitation.<sup>15</sup>

A characteristic shared by all these interpretations – even literary-critical ones – is their atomism. Each of the readings either abstracts Luke 14:15-24 from the whole of the Gospel or connects the parable with its context only thematically. Though they may highlight some thematic or theological relationships, these readings rarely find literary or rhetorical reasons for seeing the parable as functioning as one part of a larger rhetorical whole. D. L. Tiede notes the resemblance between Luke 14:15-24 and 9:57-62 – but he gives little attention to this relationship – while Evans and R. C. Tannehill associate elements of 9:51-62 with 14:25-33.<sup>16</sup>

## Patterns of Excuses in Luke

This project began with a casual observation: while reading a commentary section on the Parable of the Banquet, I was struck by the parable's similarity to Jesus' interaction with would-be followers in Luke 9:57-62. As I began to search for connections, I found that Luke repeatedly reports encounters in which an individual or series

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<sup>13</sup> R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (vol. 1; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 184.

<sup>14</sup> *Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition* (London: SPCK, 1966) 92.

<sup>15</sup> *Saint Luke* (TPI New Testament Commentaries; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 574.

<sup>16</sup> Evans, *Saint Luke*, 439-441; Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, 149, 232. Tannehill is careful to place the parable within a larger context of 14:7-24 (*Narrative Unity*, 184).

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of individuals is allowed three excuses (or opportunities).<sup>17</sup> Each time, the characters face a crucial choice.<sup>18</sup>

In the Parable of the Banquet, the host sends a slave to those who had invitations to the party. The first invitee begs off; he has bought a piece of land, and needs to go see it. Likewise the second has bought five oxen and wishes to inspect them. In the third case the guest has been recently married, and excuses himself.

When we compare this part of the parable with 9:57-62, we see different excuses and different narrative contexts, but a similar pattern. To the first potential disciple, who approaches Jesus rather than waits for an invitation, Jesus himself offers the excuse: the Son of Man and his followers must embrace homelessness. Jesus invites the second person, but this one has an excuse of his own: he must bury his father.<sup>19</sup> A third person offers to follow Jesus (Did he overhear the second?), but he needs to say good-bye to his household. Luke does not tell us directly that the three men in 9:57-62 do not follow Jesus, but Jesus' stern pronouncement in 9:62 encourages such a reading.

Now it is possible to define the pattern, and to test it against the larger context of Luke. The pattern consists of characters faced with a choice (whether to go to the banquet; whether to follow Jesus). Three times, the characters employ excuses to beg off. So far, the choices relate to invitations, and we assume that Luke views the positive response as being yes.

But to what degree must other stories conform to this pattern for it to be meaningful? If we recall that the ancient practice was to vary patterns rather than to repeat them outright, and that Luke commonly employs variation, we will look not for one-to-one correspondences, but for patterned recurrences. I propose that we seek two elements: (1) a character or a series of three characters faced with a critical choice; and (2) the presence of three excuses. If a pericope closely replicates this pattern, it deserves closer attention. These guidelines will exclude other Lucan examples of threefold narration (e.g., 3:10-14; 8:49-56; 10:25-37;

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<sup>17</sup> This pattern does not continue in Acts.

<sup>18</sup> With respect to the Parable of the Banquet, an invitation to a feast is not a crisis, but its eschatological context in Luke is.

<sup>19</sup> Whether or not the father is still alive is not crucial to this paper.

Carey, *Excuses*, IBS 17, October 1995 11:44-54; 17:34-38; 19:11-27) from our study.<sup>20</sup> I would also note that once Luke has established this pattern early in the narrative, we need not expect him to repeat it in detail later; rather, as the text progresses, Luke may simply allude to it.

The first character to fit this pattern is Jesus himself.<sup>21</sup> Three times the devil challenges Jesus (4:1-13), and three times Jesus offers biblical excuses. It would seem that three rejections are sufficient, for after the third excuse the devil has completed every test (*suntelesas panta peirasmon*) and leaves Jesus until another time.

The next occurrences of the pattern are those of 9:57-62 and 14:15-24. These two passages are linked by Jesus' statements in 14:25-33. Luke achieves this effect in three ways. First, 14:25-33 follows immediately upon the Parable of the Banquet. Second, Luke recalls 9:57-62 by introducing a similar setting. In 9:57-62, Jesus and his disciples were going along the road and people were choosing whether to follow him; in 14:25-33, many crowds are going along with Jesus. (The setting on a road is assumed.) Third, Luke has Jesus express the demands of discipleship in *three* statements: those who do not hate their family, carry their cross, or give up their possessions cannot follow. The Parable of the Banquet mentions family and possessions as excuses; in 9:57-62 family and the difficulty of discipleship are at issue.

The elder son in the Parable of the Prodigal (15:11-32) is a less certain example. He does receive three invitations to the party for his brother, one from a slave (see 14:17) and two from his father. But as in 9:57-62, Luke does not relate how the elder son responds. Also, we are not given three direct excuses by the elder son. At first, Luke relates that the son became angry and refused to go in. His second excuse is direct: he feels he is being treated unjustly. If there is a third excuse, Luke does not inform us. Also, we cannot determine how much value Luke assigns

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<sup>20</sup> It is a commonplace that three-fold patterns of narration are a standard technique of folk literature. From a rhetorical perspective, however, such patterns may be extremely important, particularly when the patterns may indicate an intended rhetorical effect or message.

<sup>21</sup> John the Baptizer's interaction with the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers (3:7-14) is also a three-fold challenge to repent, but the passage does not feature the groups' responses.



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to this choice. Still, the pattern of three invitations followed by negative responses is present.

Peter and Pilate provide the final two examples of this scheme. The case of Peter's denial (22:54-62) is a clear-cut example, for Luke has warned the audience that Peter will deny Jesus *three* times (22:34).<sup>22</sup> When Peter does deny Jesus, Luke shows his denial in three separate verbal exchanges, each of which includes Peter's own speech. As if Luke has not yet provided enough aural clues for the audience, he repeats Jesus' prediction (with variation, 22:61). The recurrence of the pattern of three opportunities is reinforced by the more explicit repetition of the number three (22:34, 61).

Pilate's case is more complex, but Luke does help the audience see the pattern by relating Pilate's last speech to the crowd as 'the third time' (*ho de triton*; 23:22). The odd thing is that Luke has actually reported Pilate addressing the crowd *five* times (23:4, 6, 14-16, 20, 22), but reports only *three* of those cases in direct discourse (23:4, 14-16, 22). It would seem that from Luke's point of view, Pilate, like Jesus, is using *three* excuses to do the right thing, but Pilate fails. Ironically, the active ministry of Jesus is framed by these two scenes: Jesus rejects the devil's temptation, but Pilate cannot resist that of the crowds. The truth is that Pilate is more like Peter than Jesus: he has three opportunities to do right and still fails.

## Conclusions

My goal is that this paper would make two contributions. First, I have intended to provide an example of how exegetical results vary depending upon the questions being asked of a given text. J. T. Walsh has used a different format to make a similar point in a *Journal of Biblical Literature* article on 1 Kings 21.<sup>23</sup> Other examples with different designs are anthologies edited by J. C. Anderson and S. D. Moore,<sup>24</sup> and by S. L. McKenzie and S. R. Haynes.<sup>25</sup> What I hope is

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<sup>22</sup> I should note that Peter does not offer three formal excuses.

<sup>23</sup> 'Methods and Meanings: Multiple Studies of 1 Kings 21,' *JBL* 111 (1992) 193-211.

<sup>24</sup> *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

distinctive about this paper is that while it recognizes the possibilities of other readings, it does argue strongly for its own place.

Second, this paper presents a fresh reading of the Parable of the Banquet. The parable participates in a Lucan motif, in which a person (or series of persons) faced with a critical choice is offered three chances. Each time, the person (or series) uses excuses, though usually not in ways Luke endorses. The choices do not always relate to invitations, and the excuses are not always explicit, but the general pattern does hold in several cases.

I would argue that this motif is not merely stylistic, but that Luke employs it for a purpose: to confront the audience with the claim of discipleship. We might say that the pattern of Luke's rhetoric calls upon his audience to see life and discipleship in stark terms: one either attends the banquet, or one is left outside. Jesus represents Luke's model subject; Peter and Pilate are tragic examples from the other pole, as are the three potential disciples of 9:57-62, the three invitees to the banquet in 14:15-24, and possibly the elder brother of the Prodigal.

An ancient audience would be likely to take notice of this pattern. Their response to *hearing* the Gospel would be similar to my own experience of reading the commentary section on the Parable of the Banquet. As the parable proceeds excuse by excuse, the audience might think, 'Where have we heard this before?' and recall the excuses of 9:57-62 and perhaps Jesus' three excuses to Satan. The problem for today's students of Luke is that we rarely *hear* the Gospel in its entirety as ancient audiences did; rather, we usually *read* it in the small bits we call pericopes.

This result enhances other readings which understand Luke 14:15-24 to express the urgency of discipleship, the third pattern identified above. My contribution would be to raise a social and ideological issue: *The patterns of excuses locate the response of discipleship in individualistic terms.* In each instance of the pattern, Luke's focus is upon an individual or a series of individuals; it is never upon the life of a community. That is not to say that the situations are

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<sup>25</sup> *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

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without social ramifications; in each instance there are social implications. The issue is simply that the decisions (and excuses) are made only by individuals.

By adding this ideological issue to the rhetorical aspects of this reading, we may place the parable within a broader Lucan context in both social and literary terms. My proposal for a social setting is influenced by the work of I. J. Mosala on Luke.<sup>26</sup> Mosala argues that Luke depicts Jesus in terms which would be acceptable to the ruling class of Palestine. Members of the ruling class would likely notice the social dynamics of the parable, a dimension emphasized by Tannehill. Such an audience would expect to be invited to nice dinners, but Luke uses this parable to confront the audience with the precarious status of its privilege.

Those who have read Mosala's work will recognize that I am co-opting it in pursuit of my own interests. Mosala criticizes Luke for erasing the real concerns of the poor in order to communicate to the powerful,<sup>27</sup> calling this strategy 'an act of political war against the liberation struggle.'<sup>28</sup> Still, Mosala does not ask the question which interests me as a member of a privileged group: 'How else could Luke address the powerful, or the comfortable for that matter?' I do not wish to combat Mosala's project, but to leave room for Luke's address to the powerful and the secure.

The individualistic emphasis of the Parable of the Banquet (as well as of its excuse-making parallels) complements Mosala's thesis that Luke's intended audience might be relatively privileged, especially in light of the economic factors involved in the first two excuses (the purchase of a field and the purchase of five yoke of oxen). It is not necessary to agree with Mosala concerning Luke's specific provenance among Palestinian elites -- such historical precision is difficult at best -- in order to provide a general setting for Luke among the privileged.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 154-189.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>29</sup> Such a reading could also lend support for the argument that Luke's addressee Theophilus is Luke's patron.



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In literary terms, this reading demonstrates that Luke 14:15-24 is interwoven with other pericopes of diverse forms for an overall rhetorical effect. In other words, this reading is not atomistic. Together with the proposed social context, this interpretation points toward a possible Lucan rhetorical setting and function -- confronting relatively comfortable individuals with the uncomfortable urgency of discipleship.

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J.W. Marshall, *Israel and the Book of the Covenant: An Anthropological Approach to Biblical Law* (SBL Dissertation Series 140; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), pp. 204.

The publication of this Ph.D. thesis, presented to Duke University under the supervision of Lloyd R. Bailey, brings to a wider audience the results of Marshall's study on the Book of the Covenant in Exodus chs. 20-23. After reviewing past research on the Book of the Covenant in ch. 1, Marshall outlines his method. His study utilises recent research into the relationship between a society's substantive laws and other factors such as social structures, economic system and environment. Examined in the light of these factors, the laws adopted by a particular society can tell us much about the nature of that society. For his part, Marshall focuses on three different ways in which anthropologists have viewed this relationship between law and society.

(1) He notes that human societies may be analysed into one of three types of socio-political cultural forms: (i) segmentary; (ii) chiefdom; (iii) state. In a segmentary society there are no permanent levels of authority with leadership roles passing from one individual to another depending on achieved status. In contrast, a chiefdom is a political unit consisting of several communities or villages under the control of a single individual or chief. The position of the chief is normally permanent and may be hereditary. According to Marshall, "Chiefs are able to enforce decisions and adjudicate rather than mediate. However, the loyalty of lower social levels must be cultivated. This is most often done by means of redistribution of wealth and by supernatural sanctions, both of which legitimate the power structure" (p. 45). At the level of state, power structures are more rigidly institutionalised, supporting the existence of different social levels. Furthermore, the state relies on force to coerce individuals to obey its sanctions.

(2) According to K.S. Newman (*Law and Economic Organization* [London: CUP, 1983]), it is possible to distinguish eight ways in which legal disputes are resolved: 1. self-redress; 2. advisor; 3. mediator; 4. elder's council; 5. restricted council; 6.

chieftainship; 7. paramount chieftainship; 8. state-level. Significantly, each legal system belongs to a different type of society.

(3) Marshall focuses on the way in which anthropologists classify cultures in terms of subsistence management (e.g., food collectors; cultivators). In particular, he notes Newman's observation "that certain types of conflict frequently recur in societies of particular economic bases, while others are virtually absent" (p. 50). Consequently, for pre-industrial societies it is possible to identify distinctive sets of laws for each of the five main types of *cultural base* (nomadic gathers; non-nomadic gathers; pastoralists; extensive agriculturalists; intensive agriculturalists). Thus, for example, among nomadic gathers common legal conflicts concern the distribution of food, unsatisfactory gifts, murder of someone within the group, and, occasionally, theft. However, laws concerning such issues as property rights and inheritance have little relevance for nomadic gathers.

By combining the findings of these three approaches Marshall is able to tabulate against each 'cultural base' its political leadership, social divisions, legal institutions and substantive laws. Having established various criteria by which a society's 'cultural base' may be recognised, Marshall proceeds to uncover the 'cultural base' reflected in the Book of the Covenant. His over-all conclusion is that it belongs to a dimorphic pastoral and agrarian society of the early to middle Iron I period.

Marshall's study is clearly helpful in viewing the Book of the Covenant from a new perspective and it sheds fresh light on the question of its date. There are, however, various criticisms which may be offered regarding both the approach and the manner in which it is executed.

First, Marshall's study relies completely on various anthropological models for understanding human societies. This raises, however, important methodological considerations. To what extent are such models definitive and universal? Will further anthropological research lead to a refining or modification of these



models? Do all societies, without exception, conform to these patterns? In the light of these questions Marshall's study may require revision in the future.

Second, in his discussion of the Book of the Covenant Marshall divides the material into two blocks on the basis of form and content (Exod 20:24-22:16 and Exod 22:17-23:19); the first section consists mainly of casuistic laws, whereas the second section is composed of apodictic laws. While such a division is understandable in the light of prior studies on the Book of the Covenant, its acceptance and use by Marshall is highly questionable for several reasons. While the bulk of the material in 22:17-23:19 differs markedly in form from that found in 20:24-22:16, it contains two distinctive literary units: 22:20-23:9 and 23:10-19. Significantly, the first of these consists of moral imperatives, not laws. One argument in favour of this is the absence of penalties by which a transgressor could be punished. While Marshall recognises the possibility that 23:1-4, 6-8 could be exhortations, he argues that these are apodictic laws, and "when unmentioned, apodictic laws carry an implied punishment, namely the death penalty" (p. 155). Yet, we may ask, would the death penalty have been enacted for someone failing to return a straying ox or donkey? Unfortunately, Marshall fails to appreciate here that this part of the Book of the Covenant deals with issues which cannot be addressed by the established judicial process. (This also explains the unusually high number of motivation clauses in 22:20-23:9; Marshall, however, interprets their presence as reflecting a social structure which was controlled at its highest level by a chief.) It is, therefore, inappropriate to assume, as Marshall does, that the material in 22:20-23:9 is 'substantive law'. Exodus 23:10-19 also forms a distinctive literary unit, this time focusing on various instructions relating to the Sabbath and pilgrimage feasts. Once again it is doubtful whether this material should be classified as 'substantive law'. Thus, Marshall is mistaken in treating 22:17-23:19 as a homogeneous unit, similar in nature to 20:24-22:16. We must, therefore, question his conclusion that Part 2 of the Book of the Covenant was added to Part 1 at a time of transition when Israelite

society “moved beyond a purely segmentary organization to a more centralized one” (p. 170).

Third, an important aspect of Marshall approach is the establishment of the number and nature of (a) authority levels and (b) social divisions reflected in the Book of the Covenant. Do the laws reflect political leadership in terms of family head, chief or state? How is the society underlying the Book of the Covenant organised in terms of sex, labour, wealth, class? In addressing these questions Marshall at times goes beyond what might be legitimately inferred from the evidence. A number of examples may be noted. (i) Marshall argues that the laws involving restitution for theft “increased and reinforced wealth distinctions and thus, social stratification” (p. 109). Such, however, would only be the case if theft was widespread and those involved were usually apprehended. (ii) Marshall assumes that the release of slaves created within ancient Israel a social class which existed between free persons and indentured slaves or servants. Such a view, however, rests on the assumption that reasonably large numbers of Hebrews fell into debt, became slaves, and later gained independence for themselves. Yet, from a study of the Book of the Covenant alone it is impossible to know if slavery was any more or any less common than, for example, sorcery or bestiality. (iii) Marshall’s belief that the female slave laws indicate gender inequality is at odds with the view of G.C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, (JSOTSS 141; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). (iv) Marshall argues that reference to the taking of an oath before Yahweh in 22:9-10 involved “theft between neighboring social groups” (p. 138) and points to the existence of a third legal level. Once again this is probably a case of reading into a particular law more than is warranted by the text. These examples illustrate well Marshall’s tendency to overly emphasise the existence of different authority levels and social divisions.

Fourth, in seeking to determine the type of society reflected in the laws of the Book of the Covenant Marshall makes several assumptions which require either further justification or

modification. (a) He assumes that the material preserved in the Book of the Covenant is either complete or at the very most extensive enough to give a broad picture of ancient Israel's laws. Thus, he observes that "in comparison with its ancient Near Eastern counterparts, laws concerned with merchant classes are absent" (p. 105). While acknowledging the difficulty of using an argument from silence, Marshall suggests, in this instance perhaps correctly, that the Book of the Covenant addresses a society which lacked a market economy. We should not lose sight of the fact, however, that the Book of the Covenant contains relatively little legal material, especially if we focus only on the casuistic laws. (b) Marshall emphasises that "legal systems are products of accretion that evolve from piecemeal constructions in the process of social change" (p. 33). Consequently, he is prepared to argue that Part 2 of the Book of the Covenant was added at a later stage. However, the idea that the legal material in the Book of the Covenant derives from actual legal practice has been challenged recently by J. M. Sprinkle, *The Book of the Covenant: A Literary Approach* (JSOT Supplement Series 174; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), who argues that the 'laws' of 20:22-23:19 do not come from a law-court setting. While such a view does not necessarily undermine every aspect of Marshall's study - one can still investigate the nature of the society reflected in the material - Sprinkle argues against the Book of the Covenant having been composed in piecemeal fashion. (c) There is a strong tendency on the part of Marshall to account for all the laws in the Book of the Covenant in terms of economic or social factors. While this may often be the case, other factors need to be considered especially when dealing with material relating to the cult. Thus, for example, Marshall unnecessarily introduces the suggestion that the feasts and offering were created to maintain adequate environmental resources; he suggests that "offering the first-born of all livestock could have reduced the strain on resources, land use, and energy required to tend extra numbers of livestock" (p. 166). Had Marshall considered more fully the biblical material outside of the Book of the Covenant, he might have been more judicious in his proposal regarding the reason for this particular cultic practice.



In spite of these criticisms, Marshall's study is welcome. Taking into account the reservations expressed above, his approach, especially as regards the casuistic laws in 21:1-22:16, is helpful in placing the Book of the Covenant in ancient Israel's pre-monarchic period.

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*The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, Richard Bauckham (Series: New Testament Theology, gen. ed. Prof J.G.D. Dunn), Cambridge University Press, 1993.

ISBN 0 521 35691 1, paper, 164 pages.

*The Climax of Prophecy*, Richard Bauckham, T&T Clark (Edin), 1993. ISBN 0 567 09620 3, hbk, 452 pages.

In culinary terms, these two impressive studies devoted to the Book of Revelation represent a main course (*The Climax of Prophecy*) accompanied by an appropriate appetiser (*The Theology of the Book of Revelation*). Both come from a master chef who has, for two decades, been helping render palatable what most readers still find to be the New Testament's most indigestible book.

The Theology of the Book of Revelation belongs to a series aimed at students of theology. Its ultimate purpose is a programmatic survey of the New Testament writings that will equip students and ordinands alike to handle New Testament documents at a profound theological level. As such, it wishes to build students and preachers a halfway house between detailed but selective verse-by-verse exegesis of a few documents on the one hand and a wide-ranging but shallow conspectus of the whole New Testament on the other. The editors hope the series will provide the necessary textbooks with which to construct new courses aimed at integrated literary and theological engagement with the New Testament documents.

Richard Bauckham is Professor of New Testament Studies at the University of St. Andrews. His contribution to the series comprises seven chapters (is the number significant?!), five of them devoted to Revelation's theology, with a first, troubleshooting chapter on how to read Revelation (covering mainly its genre and imagery) and a final, thoughtful chapter on why Revelation belongs in the canon and is worth reading today (including eleven suggestive "theological directions for contemporary reflection", p.159). The present reviewer's compliments go to the chef: I found the introductory chapter on literary form to be a helpful and reliable menu for the new reader and the concluding chapter on Revelation's contemporary relevance to be a mouthwatering recipe-book for the connoisseur.

The meat in the sandwich - the five-part examination of the book's theology, which Bauckham styles "highly theocentric" (p.23) - ranges over Revelation's trinitarian doctrine of God (ch.1), its high christology centred in the Lamb (ch.2), the book's symbolic themes relating to Christians and the world where they live and witness (ch.3), Christian prophecy and the Spirit (ch.4) and Revelation's cities contrasted with the new Jerusalem. Throughout, Bauckham structures his approach upon sensitive engagement with the text, with particular and welcome attention given to its literary structure and composition: The corpse of many a critical denigration or enthusiastic invention by less alert commentators of Revelation is thereby finally laid to rest - in itself, a useful contribution on the eve of a new millenium!

Any quibbles? Arguably, Bauckham could have devoted space to other matters additional to those dealt with. By way of example, the footnotes to chapter seven that indicate studies on how Revelation has been interpreted throughout Christian history could usefully, for this reviewer, have become a full textual treatment of the theological (mis-)handling Revelation has received in the past, and which Bauckham helps to repudiate.

*The Theology of Revelation* is uncluttered by footnotes (there are very few), but absence of extended reference to specialist study of Revelation does not imply the author's failure to engage with it. Bauckham's book includes a short, select bibliography (into

which only what he considers to be the twenty most helpful critical studies are admitted) and a brief thematic index. It is to be hoped that other volumes in this series match this one for reliability and usefulness.

Whilst preparing his starter, Bauckham was simultaneously working on his main course, *The Climax of Prophecy* - in his own words "a single sustained enterprise of understanding both the form and the message of the Apocalypse in its literary and historical contexts" (intro., ix). This *magnum opus* thus constitutes a complementary volume to the first, advancing much farther along its lines of interpretation and, it must be said, making a major contribution to the modern study of Revelation on the way.

Roughly a third of the volume will be familiar to connoisseurs of Revelation, being revised versions of articles written by the author between 1976 and 1991, but substantially reworked for his nouvelle cuisine. Four factors unify the thrust of the book's eleven essays: attention to Revelation as a literary composition, to its use of the Old Testament, to Revelation as an apocalypse, and to the first century Graeco-Roman context it both reflects and critiques. We may give brief illustration of the sort of fourfold impetus generated: Bauckham examines literary structure and John's imaginative world in the first case; Old Testament allusions whose identification is vital for interpretation following the second factor; Revelation's intertextual relationship to other apocalyptic literature and especially to the Old Testament's writing prophets in the third place; and lastly, John's metaphor-laden critique of Rome and her Empire.

Is there a chapter that carries greater weight than the others in the volume? As a title, *The Climax of Prophecy* already states the chief originality of the book. And it is with the hundred pages making up chapter nine that this emerges, under the title "The Conversion of the Nations". The writer's thesis in this tightly-worked section is, in my terms, basically this: Given Revelation's sustained allusive use of the Old Testament, which Bauckham explores at length and judges to be "subtle and disciplined" (xvi), John, it is argued, must have understood his prophecy to be the icing on the cake of Old Testament prophetic traditions.



To demonstrate this, Bauckham has to run the gauntlet of critical disagreement on whether or not Revelation really does, as he maintains, envisage the conversion of the nations and if so, how. If the English commentators Caird or Sweet generally espoused Bauckham's thesis, they did not get beyond brief commentary in its support; our author, by contrast, makes thorough inspection of the Old Testament fibres woven into Revelation's fabric his task. By detailed, sustained study of Revelation's use of Old Testament referents, the author builds a cumulative case for a precise and nuanced re-reading of them by John. In so doing, he identifies as being a theme of prominence that conversion of the nations glimpsed by the prophets which, in Revelation, climaxes in the vision of the New Jerusalem. Like any cumulative case, Bauckham's ten steps are to be considered from the vantage-point reached at the top of the flight. It is this reviewer's opinion that the point is convincingly demonstrated and deserves to hold the high ground gained.

It is not possible, here, to refer to the remaining ten chapters individually. However, Bauckham's approach is always that of paying close attention to the text, giving it the respect that the literary critic has traditionally given to a work of art and that the career theologian, at the end of our century, is once more prepared to give. As a result, solutions to problems posed by Revelation are not, for Bauckham, to be found by resorting to value judgments in general or to emendations or source theories in particular. Instead, John's work emerges from this study as a literary masterpiece, and much past disparaging commentary on Revelation is implicitly discounted for failing to engage sufficiently with the text as it stands. In short, a much misunderstood New Testament book is made largely comprehensible by the sensitive and perceptive treatment given it here.

*The Climax of Prophecy* is not an easy book to read. This is not because of poor English style or lack of clarity in organisation and presentation: On the contrary, there are no such defects. Rather, the author's sustained grappling with the difficulties of a book like John's Revelation requires the reader to be equally fit and alert! Revelation experts will gain most from Bauckham's study, first-time students will have to take it in digestible chunks but eat well in the

process, and those in-between will find themselves mentally (or even physically) changing restaurant and revising their notes and bookshelves devoted to John's Apocalypse.

A thirty-page bibliography testifies to the author's command of a vast literature, visible throughout this work, and gives ample indication of roads for the student or specialist to pursue in weighing the various issues handled or in exploring others.

In less affluent days, one was supposed to sell one's shirt to buy a gem of a theological book. By all means keep your Lacoste shirt, but buy *The Climax of Prophecy* and *The Theology of Revelation* all the same.

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